

Northeast Region Bycatch Reduction Action Items (FY07 and FY08) and Accomplishments (FY06)

The list below is a sample of the special activities underway in the Northeast Region that aim to improve our understanding and management of bycatch in the region's fisheries. The statutes governing the work of the NOAA Fisheries Service and the Fishery Management Councils require that bycatch be considered and addressed as part of every fishery management action. Consequently, much of what goes on related to bycatch, though very important, is rather routine and not easily presented in a table such as this. For example, every management action submitted by the Councils to NOAA Fisheries Service is designed, pursuant to National Standard 9 of the MSFCMA, to minimize bycatch to the extent practicable. The management actions are also closely scrutinized with regard to the likelihood that fisheries will interact with marine mammals and endangered species, and measures are designed to avoid the interactions or render them harmless to the animals.

To fulfill these obligations, NOAA Fisheries staff and the staff and members of the Fishery Management Councils engage in thousands of hours of data collection, analysis, issue identification, education/outreach, alternatives development, decision-making, and post-decision analysis. While most of the activities are not listed below, these more routine activities are constantly ongoing and critical to reducing discards in the region's fisheries.

Action	Status/Accomplishments through 9/30/06	2007	2008	How Progress Will Be Measured and/or Monitored	Milestone	Milestone Completion Date
MONITORING						
Explore the use of video monitoring of catch and discards	In phase I (pilot study), installed and operated video monitoring systems on longline vessels, collecting over 70 hours of quality video footage (see www.cochfa.org/pages/2/27/ for report). A contract for Phase 2 has been awarded and data collection will begin in FY07. Also, completed a pilot study of video monitoring on gillnet vessels.	Phase 2 will beta test a video monitoring system on 10 longline vessels for entire fishing season (if funded). A minimum of 50 video trips are planned. Data collection began in October 2006. Also, will analyze the findings of a pilot study of video monitoring on gillnet vessels. Funding for an expanded study may be pursued, depending on the results.	Conduct analysis. If video monitoring is robust and cost effective, work with management to expand test into operational applications.	Collection and inventory of video tapes (if funded)	Report summarizing study results completed (if funded)	December-07
Explore the use of video monitoring systems to view scallop dredge interactions with sea turtles.	Continued to collect video of scallop dredges in 2006, including a test in Panama City assessing a newly modified dredge's ability to cause turtles to go over, as opposed to under, the dredge. Received the final report.	More video work is planned to help assess & address sea turtle bycatch issues.	To be determined.	Collection and inventory of video tapes (if funded)	Report summarizing study results completed (if funded)	December-07
Conduct database review to identify additional existing data sources	Reviewed all available data sources that might be used to monitor catch and bycatch. The findings were used to support the deliberations of the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Oversight Committee and included in the SBRM omnibus FMP amendment.	As part of the draft SBRM amendment document, the reported findings of the database review will be refined and finalized.	Activity complete.	A final SBRM Amendment will be approved by both Fishery Management Councils.	Completed SBRM Report which contains details on catch and bycatch data sources.	July-07
Improve quantitative estimates of bycatch by gear and fishery	1) Continued to use algorithm to provide guidance for sea day coverage ; 2) Estimated sea turtle, marine mammal, and seal bycatch in those fisheries for which there is sufficient observer coverage; 3) Continued to develop methodology to estimate bycatch of sea turtles, marine mammals and seals. 4) Hired a seabird bycatch analyst in September 2006.	1) Continue to use algorithm to provide guidance for sea day coverage; 2) Continue to estimate sea turtle, marine mammal, and seal bycatch in all observed fisheries.3) Develop methodology to estimate seabird bycatch in commercial fisheries using observer data already collected; starting with the gillnet fishery.	Continue to provide guidance for sea day coverage and estimate bycatch of sea turtles, marine mammals, seals, and sea birds in all observed fisheries.	1) Provide sea day schedules to NEFSC staff to monitor coverage of fisheries; 2) Provide estimates of precision when reporting discard estimates, when appropriate; 3) Provide annual sea turtle, marine mammal, seabird and seal bycatch estimates, including a measure of variability.	1) Complete data analyses; 2) Update sea day schedule as needed; 3) Annual Marine Mammal Stock Assessment updates.	Annual
Optimally allocate observer coverage to address regional priorities	1) Continued to use algorithm and/or other tools to provide guidance for sea day coverage; 2) Optimized coverage based on funding levels; 3) Continued to request number of sea days needed to achieve 20-30% CV for each bycaught species/fishery combination; 4) Improved achieved percentage of requested sea days.	1) Continue to use algorithm or other tools to provide guidance for sea day coverage; 2) Optimize coverage based on funding levels; 3) Continue to request number of sea days needed to achieve 20-30% CV for each species/fishery combination.	1) Continue to use algorithm or other tools to provide guidance for sea day coverage; 2) Optimize coverage based on funding levels; 3) Continue to request number of sea days needed to achieve 20-30% CV for each species/fishery combination.	1) Reports of achieved sea days; 2) CV on reported bycatch estimates.	1) Quarterly reports of achieved sea days; 2) Bycatch reports for sea scallop fisheries; 3) summary memo for Coastal Virginia observer coverage; 4) Annual Marine Mammal Stock Assessments updates.	Annual, though generally within a year of when bycatch data becomes available from the Observer Program.

Gear modifications to reduce bycatch in regional priority fisheries.	Workshop held in Dec 8-9, 2005 to discuss gear modifications to reduce cetacean and sea turtle bycatch in trawl fisheries. In April 2006, the Large Whale Take Reduction Team met (http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/). In September 2006, the Atlantic Trawl Gear Take Reduction Team met to start the process of developing actions (including gear modifications) to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in trawl gear. Contract awarded to obtain catch information in a study to test a newly modified scallop dredge and compare the catch with a standard scallop dredge using a paired design. This information will be used to obtain targeted catch information as well as information to test the effectiveness of the new dredge design.	Workshop participants will meet again in December 2006. Also, will continue some of the past gear modification research (if funded).	Continue some of the past gear modification research (if funded).	Reports from projects will be reviewed.	Reports from bycatch reduction projects.	Dates per the contract specifications.
Study of animal behavior as it relates to development of gear to reduce bycatch in regional priority fisheries	(1) Submitted request for ESA permit allowing depth tracking of loggerheads in stratified mid-Atlantic waters and currently seeking funding opportunities to collect tracking data. (2) Scallop dredge video final report received. (3) Four video systems purchased and tested for attaining protected species behavior around trawl nets. Video used successfully on a scallop trawl project.	Project will be ongoing, as funds allow.	To be determined.	Reports from projects will be reviewed.	Reports from bycatch reduction projects.	Dates per the contract specifications.
Improve habitat and ecosystem information relevant to bycatch	1) Presented habitat and bycatch analyses to the September 2006 Trawl Gear Take Reduction Team. 2) Several papers from the EMAX project (which incorporates bycatch and discards in an ecosystem analysis) are in press.	1) Continue modeling habitat and bycatch of cetaceans and turtles in the various fisheries. 2) Continue EMAX project	Continue previous work, if appropriate	Reports from EMAX and from habitat/bycatch investigations.	Reports from EMAX and from habitat/bycatch investigations.	To be determined.
Establish long-term research funding program	Funded a University of New Hampshire investigator to conduct two workshops with fishery managers, scientists, and industry members to explore the effectiveness and limitations of various haddock separator innovations that have been tested under the Cooperative Research Partners Program (CRPP) and other funding sources in recent years.	Select CRPP projects that will explore ways of reducing bycatch in NE fisheries. Conduct the haddock separator workshops and provide the findings to fishery managers.	Select CRPP projects that will explore ways of reducing bycatch in NE fisheries.	Successfully solicit, select, and fund research projects that support the objectives of the NEFMC, including gear modifications to reduce bycatch.	CRPP projects selected for coming fishing year.	Projects selected by September of each year.
Utilize data provided by the fishing sector	Continued to utilize Dealer, VTR, Observer, and CRPP data, as appropriate, in stock assessment, management analyses, and seabird bycatch analyses.	Continue to utilize Dealer, VTR, Observer, and CRPP data, as appropriate, in stock assessment, management analyses, and seabird bycatch analyses.	Continue to utilize Dealer, VTR, Observer, and CRPP data, as appropriate, in stock assessment, management analyses, and seabird bycatch analyses.	Documentation of Complete SAW/SARC documents, sea turtle recovery reports, and Marine Mammal Stock Assessment documents.	Reports summarizing results.	Per the SAW/SARC and marine mammal take reduction teams meeting schedule.
MANAGEMENT						
Improve data available to the management process so that it can effectively address bycatch	Distributed PDAs to observers to enhance the timeliness of reporting of certain data fields, including selected bycatch species.	Possible expansion of data collection to electronic devices pending 2006 experience	To be determined.	Evaluate error rate in digital data versus phoned in data	20% reduction in error rate in OBSCON reporting	January-07
Improve timeliness of bycatch reporting, so that management can respond more rapidly and effectively	In some NE groundfish areas, VMS was required to be used to report catch and discards.	While use of VMS to report catch and discards will continue in some fishery sectors, there is no plan at this time to expand the practice to other sectors and fisheries.	Activity complete.	Activity is complete.	Activity is complete.	Activity is complete.
Streamline the exempted fishery permit process.	Scientists and industry members who engage in cooperative research will often have to apply for an exempted fishing permit (EFP). The process for getting an EFP can be lengthy and difficult. NMFS staff analyzed the EFP application process and instituted streamlined procedures. Guidance for the process was posted on the internet.	Activity complete.	Activity complete.	Activity is complete.	Instructions for getting an EFP under the streamlined process are posted on the internet.	Activity is complete.

Work with Councils, Commission, and Take Reduction Teams to consider management alternatives that provide incentive to reduce bycatch within planned management actions	During 2006, supported the Marine Mammal Trawl Gear, Large Whale, and Coastal Bottlenose dolphin Take Reduction Teams to develop and analyze management alternatives.	Continue to support Plan Development Teams in their work with Councils and Commission. Continue to hold meetings, as necessary, of the various Take Reduction Teams to reduce cetacean bycatch in fishing gear.	Continue to support Plan Development Teams in their work with Councils and Commission. Continue to hold meetings, as necessary, of the various Take Reduction Teams to reduce cetacean bycatch in fishing gear.	Documentation of PDT and TRT meetings. Council actions related to bycatch will include consideration of management alternatives designed to provide incentives to reduce bycatch.	For Take Reduction Team, develop methods to reduce marine mammal bycatch to PBR (or ZMRG) within time lines set out by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).	For Take Reduction Team, develop methods to reduce marine mammal bycatch within time lines set out by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).
EDUCATION/OUTREACH						
Improve NEFSC communication with constituents concerning Observer Program	Attended various fisheries forums, industry conferences, fisheries management council meetings, etc. to speak about the NEFSC observer program.	Will continue outreach efforts.	Will continue outreach efforts.	1)The number of outreach for attended; 2)Comment card cleared for use.	1)Attend six or more outreach meetings per year;2) Comment cards received and program monitoring improved.	Annual.
Gain feedback from observed vessel operators.	Gained approval under the Paperwork Reduction Act to seek feedback from operators of observed fishing vessels. Surveys will be completed on postage-paid cards, provided by the observer, or on the on-line on the observer program website.	Distribute comment cards and collect responses via mail and the internet. Prepare a report on the feedback received.	Distribute comment cards and collect responses via mail and the internet. Prepare a report on the feedback received.	Feedback program will be measured by the number of comments received. The observer program will be assessed by the comments received.	Prepare biennial reports on the feedback received on the observer program.	First report, March 2007.
Conduct a bycatch forum to allow members of the gear engineering working group, other researchers, industry members and constituents to share information about recent bycatch research and identify potential avenues for future activities (if funded)	The workshop was held in January 2006. It included managers, scientists, fishermen, and fishing industry representatives to determine structure and content for a guidebook on preparing cooperative research grant proposals.	Have copies of the booklet printed. Distribute the booklet at Council meetings, industry organization meetings, and other forums. Post on-line appendices to the booklet with detailed and current information on cooperative research funding opportunities and guidance to preparing proposals.	No plans for 2008 at this time.	Publication and distribution of guidebook for fishermen on how to develop and prepare bycatch-related research proposals..	Distribution of the guidebook	Print and distribute the booklet beginning in January 2007.